



Toby Haggith, Joanna Newman, eds. *The Holocaust and the Moving Image*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005. xii + 317 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-904764-51-9; \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-904764-52-6.



Reviewed by Sabine Hake (Department of Germanic Studies, University of Texas at Austin)

Published on H-German (February, 2006)

The Filmic Legacies of the Holocaust

The aesthetic, ethical, religious, philosophical and political questions raised by Holocaust representation occupy a central place in contemporary debates on history, memory, commemoration and witnessing, functioning both as a distinct field of study and a model of inquiry for related fields such as trauma studies and genocide studies. Film, television and photography have played a key role in the process, as attested to by the heated debates over Claude Landmann's *Shoah* (1985) and Stephen Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and as confirmed by the growing number of studies dealing with documentary film and photography. Annette Insdorf's *Indelible Shadows* (1983) and Ilan Avisar's *Screening the Holocaust* (1989) offered an initial survey of filmic treatments organized according to specific themes, genres and styles, while the recently published *Holocaust Film Sourcebook* (2004) provides an invaluable bibliographical resource. Since the strong popular reception of the NBC production *Holocaust* (1978) and, more recently, of Robert Begnini's *La vita e bella* (1997), a significant part of the discussions about Holocaust films have been driven by fears about a commercialization and trivialization of the subject matter. And ever since *Shoah*, ques-

tions of the Holocaust's capacity to be represented and narrated have guided filmic approaches to memory and commemoration in a variety of contexts and settings. However, no book to date has achieved the thematic and conceptual breadth offered by *The Holocaust and the Moving Image*, the excellent anthology edited by Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman. By including all aspects of Holocaust representation, from the production of images to their circulation, exhibition, and consumption, the editors greatly expand the parameters in which the question of Holocaust representation needs to be addressed. By taking into account all functions of film (for example, as entertainment, education, documentation, historical evidence), they also establish a conceptual framework (for example, concerning educational purposes and historiographical methods) that is bound to be of relevance to the analysis of mainstream feature films as well.

The anthology is based on a five-day symposium held in 2001 at the Imperial War Museum in London. The event brought together documentary filmmakers, film archivists, film historians, media educators, television producers, media journalists, museum curators

and Holocaust survivors. Because of the institutions involved—the Imperial War Museum (which had just opened a Holocaust exhibition), the International Federal of Film Archives and the London Jewish Cultural Centre—there was a heavy emphasis on archival, curatorial and educational approaches and concerns. The five sections of the anthology reflect the diversity of participants and their different perspectives, moving from *Film as Witness*, *Film as Propaganda*, *The Holocaust Documentary in Film and Television*, and *The Holocaust in Feature Film to Legacy and Other Genocides*. With thirty-two short contributions, the anthology does not provide the space for sustained arguments or detailed analyses. Instead, the contributors ask such basic questions as: What were the conditions under which the film documents about Theresienstadt and liberation of Bergen-Belsen were produced? How have Holocaust documentaries changed since *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955)? How should original film material be used in television documentaries and museum exhibits? How do young people in different cultural contexts respond to Holocaust films? How do survivors respond to documentary and fictional treatments of the Holocaust? How can films about genocides be used in international war crime tribunals?

Rather than separating feature films from television documentaries, Holocaust education in secondary schools from museum exhibitions, this anthology approaches the filmic representation of the Holocaust as a highly contextualized, dialogic process. Particularly illuminating in this context are the contributors of filmmakers working in documentary and animation. And particularly moving are the testimonies of one Holocaust survivor who witnessed the making of the Theresienstadt film and of several others who, in the section, “The Survivors’ Right to Reply,” share their very personal re-

sponses to recent Holocaust films. Haggith and Newman are to be commended for acknowledging lesser-known feature films about the Holocaust from Poland and the former Czechoslovakia. In a move that might not please everyone, the editors end the anthology with several articles about the role of visual media in documenting and fighting racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing and the genocides in Serbia, Rwanda and elsewhere.

Anthologies based on symposia should not be faulted for what they do not include since the selection is often guided by pragmatic concerns. Nonetheless, some reference to recent German films about the Holocaust (such as *Babij Jar* [2001] or *Der neunte Tag* [2004]) would have allowed the editors to expand their conceptual framework toward the particular dilemmas of a national cinema associated with such infamous anti-Semitic films as *Jud SÄ½ss* (1940) and *Der ewige Jude* (1937). Likewise, the participation of German exhibition designers (perhaps from the JÄ½dische Museum in Berlin) and film curators (such as those employed at the Deutsche Filmmuseum im Frankfurt/Main) could have provided a rare opportunity to connect the uniquely German project of *Ver-gangenheitsbewÄ½ltigung* (coming to terms with the past) to the international project of Holocaust remembrance. Last but not least, given the high use value of the anthology, it might have been advisable to provide rental or purchase information on the films listed in the filmography. Such minor quibbles notwithstanding, this volume is an excellent contribution to the ongoing debate on the filmic representation of the Holocaust, an invaluable resource for Holocaust educators and scholars and a powerful reminder that remembrance is a complex process involving individuals as well as social groups, film artists as well as public institutions and finally, visual media as well as critical discourses.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Sabine Hake. Review of Haggith, Toby; Newman, Joanna, eds., *The Holocaust and the Moving Image*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=11437>

Copyright © 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.